

Ex-Spy Accused Of Betraying NATO Ring

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The Central Intelligence Agency believes that one of its former agents, who has since become a leading critic of the agency, was responsible for the betrayal to the Russians of a large NATO spy ring operating in Poland, U.S. intelligence sources say. The former agent, Phillip Agee, who now lives and works in London, has been ordered deported by the British government, which has refused to give any reasons for its order.

The entire story of the Polish ring and its possible link with the former CIA agent is one of the more tangled in the history of cold war espionage, and involves some of the most prominent and glamorous figures in Poland. Jerry Pawlozowski, a Polish army officer and former world fencing champion, was among those arrested and charged with spying. Some other members of the ring the exact number is not known—were somehow slipped out of Poland by British intelligence before the trap closed shut.

Sources say the deportation order came after the CIA told British intelligence of its suspicions that Agee had a hand in exposing the spy ring. The now-destroyed ring was mainly under British control, the sources add, and British intelligence officials were very upset when it was smashed by the KGB (Soviet secret police) and Polish counterintelligence.

Other sources, however, point to a four-year lag between the time Agee supposedly revealed the spy ring's existence and the time it was broken up by the KGB. This, they say, casts doubt on the whole story. These same sources also say it was unlikely that the CIA would have told Agee of the ring's existence.

The spy ring was considered one of the leading operations ever formed by western intelligence behind the Iron Curtain. A total of 120 people were involved in the ring, and its destruction has crimped Western intelligence operations.

A hearing on the deportation order of the former CIA agent is being held this week in London in closed session, and neither British nor American officials would discuss the case yesterday. A British government spokesman said only that the agent's deportation was being sought "in the national interest."

Not all the facts are known, but the sources give this account:

Agee, 41, was a CIA agent from 1956 to 1968, operating mainly in Latin America. After leaving the agency, he became a strong critic of the CIA over what he charged were illegal covert operations by the agency. In 1973, Agee published a book titled "Inside the Company: A CIA Diary," which named many persons Agee said were CIA agents operating overseas under diplomatic cover.

Agee's actions have infuriated CIA officials, who have publicly accused him of endangering agents' lives and privately charge he is now working for the Soviet KGB. In reply, Agee has charged that the CIA is conducting a "smear campaign" and vendetta against him because of his exposure of what he has called the agency's "crimes."

Late last year, Agee held a press conference in Kingston, Jamaica, during which he identified 50 members of the U.S. Embassy staff there as CIA agents. Agee's action came as the ruling party in Jamaica was charging that the CIA had begun a destabilization program in the country—similar to the programs that ultimately toppled Chile—because of Jamaica's growing ties with Cuba.

Agee's alleged connection with the spy ring in Poland began in 1971 in Cuba. At that time, Agee was researching material on CIA operations against Cuba, and in conversations with Cuban intelligence and KGB officials, revealed the existence of a major Western spy organization operating in Poland.

Agee's knowledge of the ring allegedly stemmed from his assignment for the CIA in 1963 at the Olympic Games in Mexico City, during which he was to contact the leading member of the spy ring, Pawlowski, a lieutenant colonel in the Polish army. Pawlowski, one of the most popular figures in Poland, was also world fencing champion and had won an Olympic gold medal in 1968.

Some sources doubt the CIA's story that Agee could have exposed the that four years elapsed between Agee's alleged revelation to the KGB and that agency's move against the spy ring. Further, Agee had already told his superiors in 1963 that he planned to resign, so the CIA would hardly give him the sensitive mission of contacting the spy ring's leader.

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